

Needham Human Rights Committee Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2016

Marlene Schultz, co-chair, called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm in the conference room of the Broadmeadow School.

Committee members in attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard, Barry Ehrlich, Amelia Klein (co-chair), Marlene Schultz (co-chair), and Bud Schram.

Committee members absent: Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick, Ashok Mehta, Jeremy Sutherland.

Guests: Matt Schroeder, Joseph Tierney

1. **Minutes** of the February 25, 2016 NHRC meeting were unanimously approved.
2. **Old Business**

Committee Members We currently have 2 openings for new members. Amelia sent an email to Deb Guyot and Penny Kirk asking them if they could suggest residents of the Needham Housing Authority who might be interested in attending a HRC meeting, and consider serving on the Committee. Amelia will follow up with a phone call. Posting an invitation in the NHA newsletter might provide an opportunity for interested residents to respond to the NHRC.

Cynthia will contact people who have indicated an interest in the Committee's work and have provided their contact information on a sign-up sheet at the 2016 MLK Day Celebration.

The Committee continues to search for a NHS student to serve on the Committee. Jeremy Sutherland will be leaving the Committee after his graduation in June. The Committee was pleased to meet Matt Schroeder, a current sophomore at NHS, and hopes that he might be interested in joining the Committee.

Webpage To strengthen the role of the HRC in the Needham Community, a request will be made to post a document written by Olly Harari (a former Committee member) entitled: "Why Join the Human Rights Committee?" on the NHRC webpage. Amelia will contact Sandy Cincotta with a request.

To facilitate group input in the on-going development of the NHRC webpage, a suggestion was made to project the webpage (via Internet) on a wall during a future meeting. Ashok will be consulted about the possibilities for an Internet connection in the current meeting space, or possibly in another space at Broadmeadow.

Follow up to Public Forum on Islam North Hill residents have expressed interest in organizing an event on Islam (inspired by the Feb. 4 NHRC forum) at the North Hill location. The Committee will inform Jaime Gutner (Council on Aging) about the event as it develops. Jaime is interested in having a similar event for visitors at the Center at the Heights.

Discussion of a *second forum* on Islam focused on purpose, format, and audience. Important questions considered were:

- “What are we trying to accomplish?”
- “Is it possible to have a balanced approach in addressing issues and misconceptions related to Islam when *all Muslims* are seen as perpetrators and terrorists?”
- “How can misconceptions be clarified while addressing the opinions and fears of an audience that has been strongly influenced by negative sources (such as the media or self-appointed, unauthorized *experts* of Islam)?”
- “Would a focus on: 1) factors leading to radicalization of both Muslim and non-Muslim youth, 2) how the Muslim community is counteracting this, and 3) how they can work with others outside the Muslim community attract a large audience?”
- “How might a forum be organized geared to youth, which would include panelists representing them?”
- “Why weren’t controversial perspectives of Islam highlighted in the forum, such as those of Robert Spencer?”

The last question was raised by Joseph Tierney, a guest at the meeting. Abdul explained that the Muslim Community has relied on non-Muslim scholars, such as John L. Esposito, a well-respected Catholic Professor of Religion and International Affairs and Professor of Islamic Studies at Georgetown University, to explain opposing points of view. A video presentation of Prof. Esposito was highlighted as a resource for attendees who provided their email addresses on a sign-up sheet at the forum. Opposing points of views were also presented in a handout distributed at the forum (“The Distinctions between Orthodox Islam and Its Heretical Cults e.g. Deish”).

3. Reports

Follow-up with AGSA students Plans to organize a forum together with AGSA students were postponed until the fall. This would allow the Committee more time: to focus on developing a follow-up forum on Islam – a priority, and to plan a second forum which focuses on transgender issues, a topic frequently addressed in the news and in the Needham Community.

Marlene and Amelia will meet with the AGSA students and further discuss a fall event which meets their objectives: to reach an audience of

parents, peers, and/or teachers. One possibility would be for AGSA to organize a breakout session at the Needham Diversity Summit, which is planned for November, 2016. While they are not interested in a program that focuses only on transgender issues, we want them to know that we support them in their efforts and will be happy to work with them as they plan a program.

Immigration Justice Task Force Amelia & Cynthia reported on an initiative taken by the IJTF in response to the national immigration resettlement crisis. They attended a meeting held on March 8 which explored ways that groups within the Needham Community could partner to support the resettlement and assimilation of refugees in the Boston area. A representative of the International Institute of New England spoke about a U.S. Government program entitled: *Resettle together – Become a Partner in Local Refugee Resettlement*. (Information document handed out at meeting attached to minutes.) The Committee will inform the IJTF that it is interested in partnering to organize an educational forum in the Needham Community. The month of June – which is Refugee Awareness Month - is a possible time.

Needham Diversity Initiative Members were encouraged to attend the special NDI event on Tuesday, March 22 on “Parenting & Privilege” at the Eliot School in Needham.

Schools Matt Schroeder shared news and observations related to the NHS community. The inappropriate behavior and name-calling of students at a basketball event between Newton North and Catholic Memorial was discussed. The use of derogatory terms (and actions such as graffiti) seems to be common within the school community and needs to be addressed. NHRC members plan to meet with school officials to gather information about what is being done in the schools to create an emotionally safe, secure and respectful climate for all students. Barry will bring a copy of a survey used in his school to the April meeting.

Town issues No report.

4. New Business:

None.

Upcoming recorders:

April 28 (4th Thursday) - Ashok

May 19 - Bud

June 16- Barry Ehrlich

Meeting adjourned at 9:06 pm.

NEXT MEETING THURSDAY, April 28, 2016 7:30PM.

Respectfully submitted, Amelia Klein (Recorder)